

My First Three Husbands

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(Excerpt from *My First Three Husbands* “Chapter One – The Cowboy”)

In June 1983, my twin sister, Lisa, flew up to Petersburg (Alaska) and moved in with us on the boat for eight weeks. We knew Carl would be out in the field for days and weeks at a time as his job took him to nearby islands, deep in the forest to manage the timber harvest. He was in favor of Lisa’s visit, most likely focused more on the idea of living with twins than on the state of our marriage. And I was grateful for the company. I needed someone to talk to while Carl was away.

I helped Lisa get a job at the local bank, and we had a lot of fun fooling the locals. It took awhile for news to get around there were twins in town. One gentleman complained that I had taken two good jobs, and said, “Don’t you think that’s greedy?” He became a bit flustered when I said, “That’s not me at the bank. That’s my twin sister.” Another man came to me at the post office and said, “Did you know there’s a girl at the bank who looks just like you?” Lisa had the difficult task of responding to my friends who thought they were talking to me. She’d have to stop them in mid-sentence and say, “I’m not Jennifer. I’m her twin sister, Lisa.” A look of shock and confusion often followed, but it was a small island, and after a few weeks, everyone knew the story. From that point on, conversations began with, “Are you Lisa or Jennifer?”

Carl’s enthusiasm toward living with twins came to a screeching halt when he realized he was living with two stubborn women who wouldn’t put up with his bad jokes and false accusations. Lisa’s presence gave me strength and confidence to stand up stronger for myself,

and half way into her visit, she finally said something to put Carl in his place, “Why do you give Jennifer so much crap?! She’s a good wife. She works hard. She cooks, she cleans, she takes care of you, and she takes care of the boat when you’re gone. What is your problem?!” I don’t remember how Carl responded to that, but I do remember how relieved he was to get back in the field and away from us. “*What have I gotten myself into?*” must have been a constant question running through Carl’s mind.

When my husband was home, I did my best to keep the peace, but a sister knows when there’s trouble, and living in close quarters, there was no hiding anymore. Lisa could see the marriage unraveling, and I found solace and comfort knowing she was with me until early-August.

I remember the moment I told Lisa I wanted to leave Carl. He was gone for the week, out on a logging road survey over the Fourth of July, and Lisa and I had the chance to talk freely. “Today is Independence Day, *my* Independence Day! I’m tired of living in the cold, wet weather of Southeast Alaska. I’m tired of taking Carl’s abuse.” That was the moment I emotionally divorced from the marriage and began to make plans for a different future, a future without Carl. First item on the agenda was to move south before winter set in, and I kept this decision to myself until the time was right.

THE DIVORCE

August came around and Lisa flew back to Florida. The following month I found the courage to tell Carl, “I want to leave Petersburg and go back to the lower forty-eight.” I said, “It’s been hard living here, and I think our problems have a lot to do with the stress of being in Alaska. We both want to be back down south, but I can’t wait anymore. I think it’s best if we divorce. We can try getting back together when you get a transfer to Wyoming or Idaho.”

That last part was a flat-out lie, but I did it in the name of self-preservation, tired of the confrontation, and concerned Carl might resort to physical violence. Alaska was turning him into a man I no longer recognized, and I was frightened of him. Fortunately, he had enough sense to admit things were bad and agreed to the divorce. The option to pursue counseling was never discussed.

I quit my job at the Petersburg post office knowing I had worked the required two years that would allow me to be rehired into any office in the United States that had an opening, no test required. The possessions I packed for the move south were items that would fit in boxes I could mail. A week before our second anniversary, Carl and I filed for divorce with the same magistrate who married us, and to make things quick and easy, I gave Carl my share of the investment in the boat.

Two weeks later, Carl drove me to the docks to wait for the ferry headed south to Seattle, Washington. We parked among the other cars and waited for the call to board. Sitting in the front seat of the truck that cold October night, we talked awkwardly about our future. “So, what will you do after you get to your parents’ house?” (pause) “I don’t know.” “Are you going to try and get back in the post office?” “Yeah.” Carl asked a third question, “Will I ever see you again?” “Sure, we can get together when you transfer down south,” I lied for the second time, again out of fear and wanting to keep the peace.

Inside the truck, the temperature was dropping quickly. Carl put the key in the ignition to start the engine and turn on the heater. It was an innocent gesture, but I completely freaked out, frightened by the idea he was about to drive away, taking me with him and cause me to miss the boat.

In the time it took him to turn the key, I swung the passenger door open, took a leap, and stood trembling on the pavement with eyes wide open staring at Carl. It may have been excessive behavior, but I was much smaller than he was and no match for a fight. What happened next surprised me. I saw for the first time recognition he had taken his controlling ways too far. Apologizing for his behavior over the past year, my soon-to-be-ex convinced me to get back in the cab. I climbed in, decided it would be okay for a few more minutes, and kept one hand firmly on the door knob just in case. *“This will all be over soon,”* I chanted within, *“They’ll be calling for passengers soon.”* Five minutes later, we were saying our final farewells.

I had never been in an abusive relationship before, and I had no idea how to say good-bye. We hugged, promised to see each other again whenever he got a transfer (lie number three), and all I kept thinking was, *“This marriage is finally over.”*